

Testimony of Kassey Neason
Appropriations Committee 02/17/2022
Increase Funding for Independent Living Centers by \$1million Governor's Proposed
FY 23 Budget Adjustments
H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

I have been employed at Independence Northwest, Inc, an Independent Living Center in Naugatuck, CT for about 8 years. At this agency, I am employed as an Independent Living Advocate for Deaf Services Program. Without our help, many of the individuals we have met through this program may not have received the services they needed to gain and maintain their independence.

Over the years, CT's five Independent Living Centers have experienced funding cuts or have been flat-funded. Each fiscal year, it appeared that were being asked to do more with less for a community that is already disenfranchised. This made it difficult to stretch the dollars to provide services to all the individuals we serve. In past years, we have been forced to trim back on services and instituted waitlists to ensure consumers receive the services they require. Many of the consumers we serve, have struggled to maintain their independence in the community and may not have been successful in maintaining that independence without assistance from the skilled staff at our center. Today, I am writing today in support of increasing funding to the centers by \$1 million.

The work we do is important. We have a positive impact on the lives of those we serve. One consumer who moved from another country came to our office needing some assistance with several things. English and American Sign Language is not his first language. He wanted to improve on understanding English to be able to read and use ASL to speak. He needs a job to work and need a driver's license. I assisted him by practicing reading and writing in English. We talk in ASL, and he improved as he learns. Meanwhile, I helped him to study for a driver's license and prepare for the test. He passed and got his driver's license. He got a job. He is living independently. Another consumer that I worked with got out of prison. He had nothing when he was discharged. He was lost. He does not have any resources to get some help. I assisted him to get some services that he needs and ensure that he is living independently. Also, I helped him to get some things that he needed like obtaining social security card, birth certificate, and among things. Our services are vital to the disability community, a population often overlooked and underserved. We employ friendly, skilled, knowledgeable staff, who work incredibly hard to deliver services to meet an individual needs. Lack of adequate funding at the center has resulted in zero cost of living increases for the staff. Additional funding would permit the centers to continue meeting the needs of those seeking services and to function at optimum levels with staff dedicated to meet those needs.

In closing, I want to thank you for your time, consideration, and support of our request for additional funding. It will help the services provided by the centers make a difference to help the individuals in the deaf community to live independently.

Respectfully Submitted by:
Kassey Neason
Independence Northwest, Inc.